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Chairman Crisco, Chairman Megna, and Honorable Members of this Insurance and Real Estate Committee, I ask for your support of Connecticut's Regional Fire Schools and House Bill 5518 to fund our Operating Budgets, critical Fire Service training, and essential fire equipment statewide. Regional schools such as ours in Fairfield have been providing both classroom and practical training facilities to Fire, Police, EMS, Public Health, and Public Works Departments, Emergency Management & Homeland Security agencies, Haz-Mat, SWAT and Medical Response Teams, and public servants throughout every part of the state in a relatively unique fulfillment of this legislature's stated desire for regionalization, yet the cuts currently on the table for the coming Fiscal Year would put most of us out of business. Our ability to operate on nights and weekends when volunteer departments and career firefighters often need our resources most would be virtually eliminated; our available funding to develop training programs in an ever-changing world of hazards would be deeply diminished; and recently restored, currently under construction, crumbling or closed Regional Fire Schools awaiting authorized bonding and repairs will begin or continue to deteriorate in the absence of state funding.

There are several painful ironies to the current funding cuts to Regional School Operating Budgets: the actual reduction, while a tiny fraction of the deficit this body seeks to remedy, represent debilitating percentages of lost funding to the fire service, while the very regionalism touted as essential to more responsible fiscal management across the state is profoundly and negatively impacted by these resources being diminished or closed. New state initiatives in transportation via road, rail or waterway; new threats identified by workplace violence incidents in Manchester and Newtown; and new hazards created by our rapidly evolving global presence bringing medical and geopolitical pathogens all require trained and practiced interaction between fire, police, medical and public works through training which has been provided by Connecticut's Regional Fire Schools through Traffic Incident Management, Unified Command, Search & Rescue, Ebola Medical Response and countless other programs.

Whether as Training Director of the Fairfield Regional Fire School charged with meeting the needs of first responders and public servants from across the state who utilize our Regional School; Assistant Chief in charge of Training for the Fairfield Fire Department with a duty to train those fire fighters who protect the community we serve; Chairman of the Fire Emergency Support Function for Region 1 of the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland



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Security with the responsibility of ensuring interoperability between agencies and municipalities in emergency responses throughout Region 1; or member of the Fairfield Hazardous Incident Response Team responding for the past quarter century to chemical suicides, caches of combustibles in residential areas, conflagrations involving vast quantities of hazardous materials, and potential terrorist threats, I can personally testify to the unique value and importance of Connecticut's Regional Fire Schools. Whatever hat I wear, whichever agency I represent, my message is the same: Connecticut's fire service cannot afford to stop funding its Regional Fire Schools for the first time in five decades.

In closing, we understand that you and your colleagues are performing fiscal triage up here in Hartford, just as you understand that our students are performing life-saving triage back home in their communities and through mutual aid to the region and across the state. Your first responders need these training facilities funded in order to fulfill their mission to protect lives, property, and the environment, and I ask on their behalf that you vote in favor of House Bill 5518.